

Lessons in Guyanese History

From Abolition to Rastafari



Credit: Barrington Braithwaite

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Edited by Hazel Woolford for the Guyana Institute of Historical Research

2018



Lessons in Guyanese History From Abolition to Rastafari

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Document

A History of the Healing for the Theocracy Party

Purpose:

This publication, is designed to assist all teachers and, instructors in the smart classroom. The objective of this book is to support the teacher in the class room and in the preparation of notes of lessons, but it will also meet the needs of all students engaged in the study of the social history of Guyana. This is particularly important, as Guyana moves towards universal secondary education.

E- learning is global and is certainly a part of the delivery of education in Guyana.

Craig Weiss, e- learning industry analyst and E- Learning 27/7 blogger stated

Video Management Systems/ Video E-Learning Platform- Both terms are utilizing the same tactic- you can create/ upload a video into their systems and offer your learners a multitude of features and capabilities. For the most part they offer the same capabilities (yes, they all offer a different feature or two), but only one vendor includes SCORM as part of their product. To me, that vendor is the leader in the space and one I would want to use.

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Lesson 1

Between a little rock and a hard place: intra-Caribbean indentured immigration and Guyana, 1834 to 1838¹

By Allyson Stoll

Abstract

Caribbean immigration scholarship has focused on the coming of indentured Asians, Portuguese and Africans to the sugar plantations after 1834. Recently, specific intra-Caribbean flows have also been examined but the circumstances related to indentured people of Caribbean origin who transited Guyana's (formerly British Guiana) borders remain insufficiently represented. The 1838 Immigration Return examined here accounts for an early stream of migrants to Guyana between 1834 and 1838. Repositioned as a regional flow driven principally by environmental push factors, the Return unfolds as a rare, detailed and instructive record of intra-Caribbean mobilities that helps demystify the protracted half-light between the putative end of enslavement and the elusive dawn of full freedom.

This micro-study assesses an 1838 Immigration Return on indentured immigrants in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) included with Sessional Papers of the House of Lords for 1839, hereafter, the 1838 Return. This study extrapolates, re-tabulates and analyzes data for British and French-ruled islands, for the Dutch Caribbean colonies, the former Danish Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Island dependencies, and Sweden-ruled St. Barthélemy. Significantly, the Bahamas tally includes Africans taken from ships captured by naval patrols enforcing Britain's 1807 ban on the trade in enslaved people. These "Liberated Africans" were resettled in Guyana after spending years in the Bahamas and were the first indentured Africans in Guyana.

¹ Research first presented at the Guyana@50 Golden Jubilee National Symposium Series, May 23-24, 2016 (Arthur Chung Conference Center, Georgetown, Guyana).

Table 1: Summary of Caribbean indentured immigrants in Guyana, 1834-1838.

Summary of immigrants of Caribbean origin received in Guyana between September 1834 and December 1838. (Compiled from the official returns of the special justices of the peace).																											
British Colonies																											
Arrivals to 9/1838		Anguilla		Antigua		Bahamas		New Providence, Bahamas		Watling's Island, Bahamas		Nevis		St. Christopher (St. Kitts)		Montserrat		Dominica		St. Lucia		Tortola, BVI		Virgin Gorda/ Spanish Town, BVI		Total	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
Gender		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	1084	
Adults		158	##	73	12	215	86	16	2	19	16	33	20	51	16	106	15	13	1	7	0	77	25	7	4	64	
Children		22	9	2	1	10	5	0	0	2	2	0	0	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	64	
Sub-total		180	##	75	13	225	91	16	2	21	18	33	20	56	16	107	16	13	1	7	0	80	26	7	4	1148	
Bahamas and BVI																						426		117		543	
Total		301		88		316		18		39		53		72		123		14		7		106		11		1148	
Danish Colonies								Dutch Colonies				French Colonies						Swedish Colony		Unknown territory							
Arrivals to 9/1838		St. Thomas		St. Croix		Curacao		Nickerie, Suriname		Saba		St. Eustatius		Martinique		St. Martin		St. Barthélemy		"Para"							
Gender		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F						
Adults		25	13	1	0	148	72	9	0	34	8	36	52	184	6	5	11	13	3	1	0						
Children		0	0	0	0	7	2	0	0	0	0	7	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Sub-total		25	13	1	0	155	74	9	0	34	8	43	54	186	6	5	11	13	3	1	0						
Sub-total (2)		38		1		229		9		42		97		192		16		16		1							
Total, Non-British Colonies				39				377						208				16		1							
Total, Unknown Territory																										1	
Total, All Territories																										1789	
Total, Indentured																										1777	
Total, Not Indentured																										12	
Adults, All Colonies																										1705	
Men, All Colonies																										1230	
Women, All Colonies																										474	
Male Children, All Colonies																										61	
Female Children, All Colonies																										23	
Documented Deaths, Males, included																										-81	
Documented Deaths, Females, included																										-27	
Total Arrivals with Deceased, Repatriated, Expired Indentures																										1894	

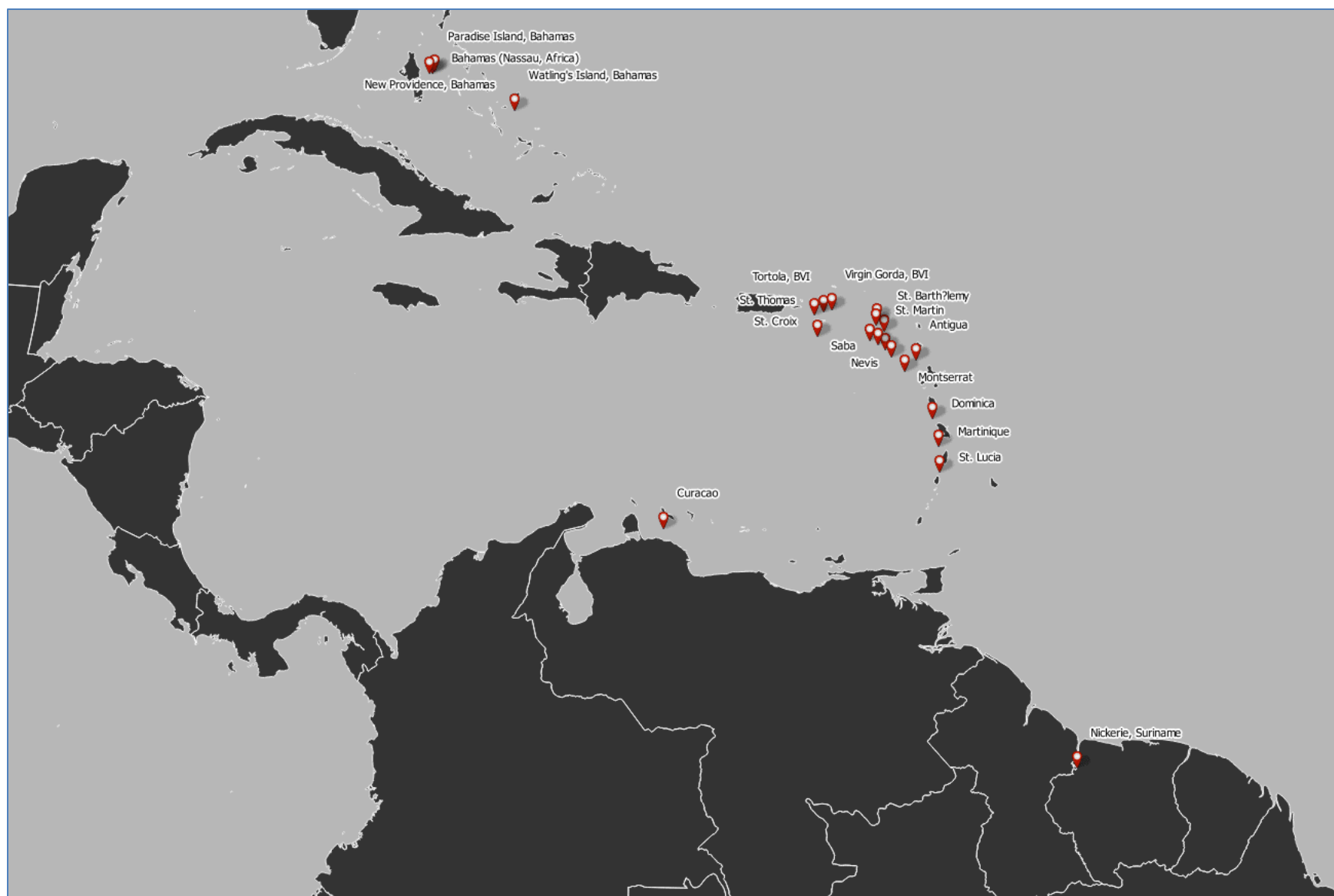


Figure 1: Origins of Caribbean indentured immigrants in Guyana, 1834-1838

Fight and flight: intra-Caribbean migration in the 1830s

The 1830s opened to the laments of British Caribbean planter-mercantilists protesting “distressed conditions” in the sugar colonies.² Though sugar was still ‘king’, the industry was buffeted by low prices, loss of preferential access to British markets and increasing production costs in the colonies. Centers of production were shifting again and robust competition was coming from non-British territories, particularly Cuba and Brazil, where surging production had increased their share of the sugar trade. Trans-Atlantic freight charges had risen as had prices of plantation building and food supplies—particularly salted fish and meats, maize (“Indian corn”), corn-meal and wheat flour—normally imported from North America and Europe. Concomitantly, with the British trade in slaves terminated from 1807, the cost of maintaining the aging enslaved work force reportedly exceeded profits derivable from their labor.³ Labor was scarce in Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad, especially, and planters and local governments looked overseas for future workers.

With cane-fields covering from 750 to 2000 acres and coffee and cotton estates encompassing a minimum of 500 acres, Guyana seemed an insatiable agro-industrial magnet attracting many hands while perpetually seeking thousands more. Language similarities enticed migrants from non-English speaking territories as there were still many Dutch and French plantation owners in the colony. Though English had become the planters’ language, working men and women conversed in Creole-Dutch. Significantly, Denmark’s St. Thomas shared this penchant for Dutch-based Creole.⁴ Offers of free “tickets of residence”, combined with promises of being placed on an “equal footing” as native inhabitants after service, were attractive incentives to stay in

² *West India Colonies*, pp. 3-5, and *passim*.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 5-7, and *passim*.

⁴ Hall and Higman, *Slave Society in the Danish West Indies*, p. 492.

Guyana.⁵ Other push-factors centered on slavery, and environmental conditions prevailing in the Caribbean at the time.

Enslavement persisted elsewhere for decades after Britain ended its trade in 1807 and human bondage in its colonies in 1834. The Dutch prolonged slavery in their Caribbean colonies until 1863 and Suriname, which borders Guyana, held slaves until 1873 after a mandatory ten-year Apprenticeship. Although slavery continued in Martinique until 1848, the island was plagued by rebellions and uprisings, notably, one in St. Pierre in 1831 and another in Grande Anse in 1833. Enslavement lasted until 1847 in Sweden-ruled Saint Barthélemy, and up to 1848 in Denmark's St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. Jan (St. John).

Environmental push-factors decided the fate of other migrants. By the 1830s, soil erosion and the chenille bug terminated a fleeting cotton boom on the Bahamas. An intense drought swept through the island chain in 1835 where, on cays and islets with arid, barren environments, enslaved people had performed the taxing tasks associated with salt-raking.⁶ Denmark's St. Thomas endured a devastating hurricane in August 1837 during which many lives and much property were lost.⁷ The fortunes of the British Virgin Islands had declined precipitously by the time of Abolition, aggravated by several hurricanes—particularly the catastrophic 1837 season which devastated plantations and killed many people, made worse by an extended drought that also began in 1837 and lasted several years. Tiny Anguilla relied almost exclusively on its salt extraction revenues after 1800 and the majority of ex-slaves subsisted only by seasonal employment.⁸ On Dominica, Whitefly-coffee pest-wreaked havoc from 1829 and both sugar and coffee plantations across the island were

⁵ An Ordinance for the better Regulation and Enforcement of the relative Duties of Masters and Employers, and articed Servants, Tradesman, and Labourers, in British Guiana.—Passed 22nd June 1836.

⁶ Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, I and II*, passim.

⁷ Gurney, *A Winter in the West Indies*, p. 26.

⁸ Higman, *Slave Populations of the Caribbean*, p. 43.

decimated by the disastrous hurricane of September 1834 that leveled the homes and provision-grounds of the island's black population.⁹

Table 2: Caribbean-Atlantic Hurricanes 1830-1840.¹⁰

Caribbean-Atlantic Hurricanes, 1830-40.		
Year	Period	Territories Affected
1830	August to December	Barbados, Martinique, Dominica, Jamaica, Dominica, St. Thomas, Turks Island, northern Bahamas, United States East Coast.
1831	June to August	Barbados, Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, Florida.
1832	June to August	Cuba, Bahamas, Bermuda, Jamaica.
1833	August; October	Guadeloupe, Antigua, Bermuda, Dominica, Cuba, Gulf of Mexico.
1834	September; October	Dominica; Martinique.
1835	April; July; August; September; November	Coastal United States; Barbados; Antigua, Cuba, Galveston (Texas); Barbados, Gulf of Mexico, United States, Nova Scotia.
1837	July to August	Barbados, St. Lucia; Barbados, Cuba, Martinique; Antigua, St Thomas, Lesser Antilles, Turks Islands.
1838	September	Bahamas, Vera Cruz.
1839	June; September; November to December	Antigua; Bermuda, Galveston; Gulf of Mexico; United States, North Atlantic.
1840	May; September	Madeira; Puerto Rico.

A particularly destructive hurricane struck Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat in August 1835. The latter three islands were perpetually susceptible to drought and with a high percentage of arable land dedicated to cane instead of food crops, rations were habitually imported and more expensive. In 1836, Nevisian apprentices were close to starvation owing to a prolonged dry spell sweeping the small island.¹¹ Restrictions on public reserves (Crown Lands) on St. Kitts eliminated the possibility for purchase or occupation by ex-slaves and cultivation in the central mountain range was prohibited

⁹ "Communications received by His Majesty's Government relating to the Hurricane at Dominica", pp. 1-14, and pp. 11-13.

¹⁰ Garriott, *West Indian Hurricanes*, p. 24.

¹¹ Sturge and Harvey, *The West Indies in 1837*, pp. 50-51.

as a soil conservation strategy.¹² Antigua was shaken by an earthquake in 1833 and battered by the August 1835 hurricane after which Yellow Fever raged. Severe droughts in 1833, 1836, and 1837 laid waste to cane-fields and provision-grounds and exposed entire communities of ex-slaves to famine and starvation.¹³

Colonial authorities anticipated that ex-slaves would resist the manacles re-imposed by Apprenticeship and individual legislatures conspired with the British Colonial Office to bind workers to the fields.¹⁴ For example, from 1833 anti-squatting and vagrancy laws acted in consort to stymie the movement of plantation workers and revision of regulations governing the hours of compulsory labor to include sanctioned breaks for field workers did not materialize until 1838.¹⁵

“This disgraceful traffic”: apprenticed immigration and Guyana

Anticipating a shortfall in labor after August 1834, Guyana looked outward for new workers focusing first on Caribbean islands with surplus labor. Planters and itinerant speculators, called “apprentice-traders”, brought free people, apprentices, and the enslaved to Guyana under contracts of indenture. Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, Tortola were target islands with traders buying the contracts of apprentices and advancing them between one and four dollars as enticement to migrate. Visitors to Montserrat, a small, poverty-stricken colony in 1836, lamented the “disgraceful traffic” which spirited away many ex-slaves following “ship-board manumissions” and “Indentureship ceremonies”.¹⁶ A majority of the recruits were non-field workers—domestics and skilled artisans—as soliciting praedials was discouraged and restrictions imposed on their mobility. Nevertheless, traders lured skilled tradespeople, falsified their classifications and bound them to cane-fields and coffee estates

¹² Richards, *The Pursuit of ‘Higher Wages’ & ‘Perfect Personal Freedom’*, p. 278.

¹³ *Antigua and the Antiguans*, pp. 168-69, and 189, 191-93.

¹⁴ Hovey, *Letters from the West Indies*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁵ Great Britain. *Appendix. Orders in Council and Colonial Laws*, 1836, pp. 1-203.

¹⁶ Sturge and Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

in Guyana.¹⁷ Apprentice-traders also looked to Curacao, St. Eustatius, St Thomas and other non-British islands where slavery persisted, and to the Bahamas and Havana where Liberated Africans taken from slave ships were put ashore.¹⁸ The enslaved were lured to “the more cheering prospects of [Guyana]”—free of hurricanes and with abundant vacant land—with promises of unconditional freedom at the expiration of five and seven-year bonds.¹⁹

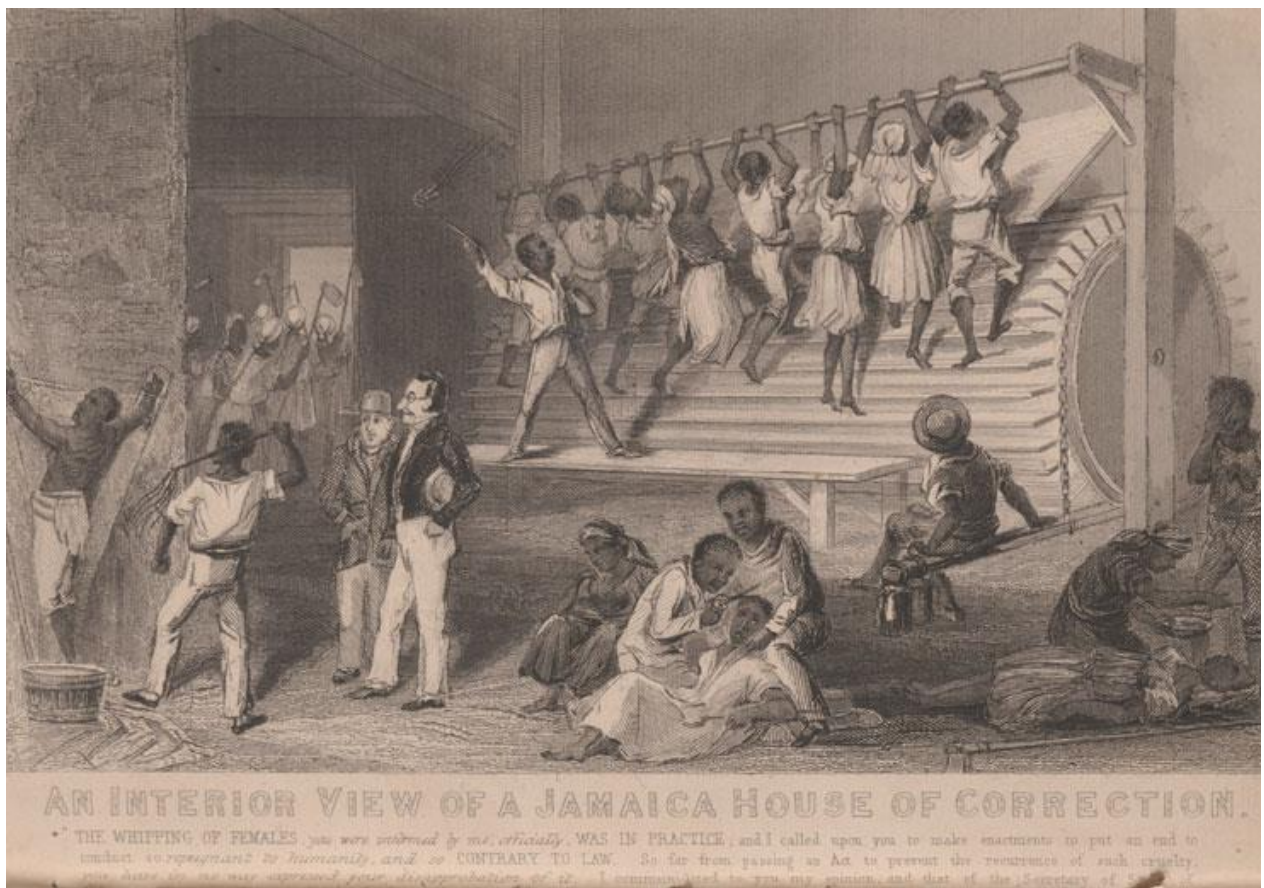


Figure 2: Punishment by treadmill in Jamaica, 1837.²⁰

Recruiters were met with hostility and a flurry of anti-emigration laws were enacted by planter-dominated legislatures fearing shrinking labor pools and a corresponding

¹⁷ Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar, and Federalism*, p. 80; Watts, *Patterns of Development*, p. 481; Sturge and Harvey, pp. 8 and 12-13.

¹⁸ Light to Normanby, 16 July 1839, p. 12.

¹⁹ *British Guiana. Miscellaneous*, p. 182.

²⁰ London: printed for the Central Emancipation Committee, 1838 [FCO Historical Collection HT1165 NOR]

rise in wages that could bankrupt small island economies.²¹ From 1835 maritime operators faced heavy fines or imprisonment if caught ferrying island apprentices without passports and persons departing without sanction faced hard labor in jail, penal conscription or severe floggings if caught.²² Post-1834 laws prohibited the transfer of field workers -“praedial apprentices” - between plantations and among colonies.²³ The Barbados legislature frustrated traders by requiring proof of a ship’s seaworthiness and made it mandatory for ships to be stocked with pork, beef, rice, peas, coffee, water and medicine in quantities found excessive for a voyage to Guyana lasting only a few days.²⁴ Not everyone was against recruitment, however, and some island proprietors participated actively in the lucrative business.

Caribbean people coerced into migrating in the interval between Abolition and Emancipation faced new and equally difficult conditions in the destination colony. Guyana was notorious already for contravening the Abolition Act and the London Anti-Slavery Society lamented measures deemed self-serving to planters who had themselves crafted the Apprenticeship regulations.²⁵ Non-praedial apprentices were deliberately misclassified as praedials effectively binding them for two years beyond the four imposed on non-praedials.²⁶ Apprentices in Guyana were further compromised. Where, formerly, under Dutch colonial law each plantation had to set aside one acre of provision grounds for every five enslaved workers under penalty of monetary fine, British planters could appropriate subsistence plots to maximize cultivation and garner greater profits.²⁷ Some owners, attorneys and estate managers maliciously uprooted crops in the provision-grounds and destroyed livestock.²⁸

²¹ Levy, p. 82; Cockburn to Glenelg, 2 June 1838, pp. 2-3.

²² Enclosure in No. 255. *Special Justices in British Guiana, for the Month of November 1835*, p. 112.

²³ *Orders in Council and Colonial Laws*. Part III (2), 1836, pp. 1-203, passim.

²⁴ Levy, op. cit., p. 81.

²⁵ Scoble, *Speech delivered at the Anti-Slavery Meeting*, p. 8.

²⁶ *Negro Apprenticeship in the British Colonies*, pp. 3-4, and 66; Sturge and Harvey, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

²⁷ *Regulations relative to ... Farinaceous Food*, pp. 105-106.

²⁸ *Papers in Explanation*, III. (2), 1836, pp. 99.

Punishment was severe and even minor transgressions were met with harsh penalties. Despite an ordinance banning extra-judicial flogging administered with brutal cart-whips after March 1, 1834, Guyana nevertheless reinstated the treadmill already abolished during the closing years of slavery. Flogging continued sanctioned by the special magistracy.²⁹

Clothing and housing arrangements were reduced or withheld entirely under Apprenticeship. Many apprentices, forced to clothe themselves as best they could, were observed at work nearly nude or clad in rags. Children as old as seven or eight years routinely appeared unclothed.³⁰ The housing stock left over from slavery was recycled for apprentices and “guaranteed” repairs and renovation had not materialized on many Guyana estates almost three years into Apprenticeship. Accommodation was invariably cramped and dilapidated.³¹ Some workers were homeless, and on large estates such as *Kitty*, *Le Repentir* and *La Penitence* entire families routinely occupied single rooms.³²

Food allowances—non-wage compensation during Apprenticeship—was an especially contentious subject in Guyana. As during enslavement, the local legislature let employers choose between giving foodstuffs or allowing each apprentice access to provision-grounds and 40 working days to grow his or her food. Where foodstuffs were issued in lieu of land apprentices were to receive a minimum of three pounds of salt fish and 70 pounds of plantains, weekly or other starchy ration.³³ Child apprentices under 12 years got half adult rations. Significantly, plantation workers in Guyana were denied the food quantities stipulated by law even before Apprenticeship

²⁹ Enclosure (C.) in No. 95, Address to Slave Population, 1834, pp. 127-128; “Mr. Scoble’s Inquiries”, pp. 81-84.

³⁰ Innes, *Letter to the Lord Glenelg*, pp. 21-22; *Papers in Explanation*, III. (2), 1836, p. 481. [St. Lucia].

³¹ *Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the State of the German, Portuguese, Coolie, and Maltese Immigrants*, p. 113.

³² Mr. Scoble’s Inquiries, p. 85.

³³ *Regulations relative to ... Farinaceous Food*, pp. 104-108 and passim.

began.³⁴ Governor James Carmichael Smyth clashing with the colony's powerful planter elites, remonstrated:

The estates in Berbice are highly cultivated, produce immense profits, and are making the most ample returns to the proprietors. To endeavour, under such circumstances, to muzzle the ox which is treading out their corn; to give to a stout labouring man, for his weekly subsistence, but ten pints of ground corn or of dirty rice; appears to me to be an act of the most ill-judged parsimony.³⁵

The planters countered that apprentices in the Bahamas got no salt fish rations and had to barter some of their corn-meal for fish.³⁶ John Gladstone, a prominent planter, alleged speciously that Guyana's apprentices were permitted to fish plantation canals and cultivate as much land as they wanted, consuming or selling the produce as they wished.³⁷ In denouncing Gladstone's duplicity Governor Smyth pointed out that while the planter had been arguing that 10 pints of rice per week was more than adequate for a laboring man in Guyana, he (Gladstone) proposed supplying 15½ pints weekly for each indentured East Indian worker imported for his sugar estates Vreed-en Stein and Vreed-en-Hoop.³⁸ Reports from 1837 and 1838 illustrate the effect on lives of working families relying on adequate food to meet the arduous demands of plantation labor.³⁹ If given a choice, Liberated Africans opted for rice instead of plantains.⁴⁰ Caribbean islanders, particularly those born in the Bahamas, invariably chose corn-meal as this had been their staple at home.⁴¹ Exchanging unwanted food for preferred items was common as was resale of surplus at district markets especially if apprentices were able to procure ground-provisions either by self-employment cutting and selling pasture

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 105-108.

³⁵ Ibid, 122-24.

³⁶ Ibid, and Hovey, op. cit., pp. 26-27.

³⁷ *Regulations... Farinaceous Food*, Enclosure 7, pp. 131-132.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 135.

³⁹ Ibid. See pp. 136-142.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Enclosure 2, in No. 127, p. 137.

⁴¹ Ibid., Enclosure 11, in No. 127, pp. 140-141; Enclosure 4, in No. 127, 138; Enclosure 13, in No. 127, p. 142.

grass.⁴² After a year of debates, the British government mandated that, from April 25, 1838, each apprentice was to receive 70 pound of plantains weekly, commutable for three pints of corn-meal, or two pints of rice, per 10 pounds of plantains.⁴³ At this stage, the capricious and oppressive food regulations had plagued Guyana's emerging working population of ex-slaves, native-born and immigrants, for virtually the duration of Apprenticeship.

Table 3: Caribbean indentured immigrant arrivals in Guyana, 1834 to 1838.

Indentured arrivals in Guyana, 1834 to 1838. (Compiled from the official returns of the special justices of the peace).	
Colony	Date of First Indenture
Bahamas	16-Jun-1835
St. Kitts	7-Feb-1836
Montserrat	16-May-1836
Nevis	4-Jun-1836
St. Barthélemy	20-Jun-1836
Anguilla	12-Jul-1836
Dominica	12-Jul-1836
Tortola, BVI	2-Sep-1836
Virgin Gorda, BVI	3-Sep-1836
Antigua	7-Sep-1836
St. Thomas	26-Oct-1836
St. Martin	31-Oct-1836
Curacao	13-Dec-1836
Saba	11-Feb-1837
St. Eustatius	11-Feb-1837
Martinique	17-Feb-1837
St. Croix, St. Lucia	12-Aug-1837
Nickerie, Suriname	4-Oct-1837
Watling's Island, Bahamas	14-May-1838

Caribbean indentured immigrants in Guyana

⁴² Ibid., Enclosure 5, in No. 127, p. 138.

⁴³ Ibid., Enclosure in No. 128, pp. 143-144.

On arrival in Guyana, immigrants were dispersed to plantations or hired out as unattached labor with a percentage of their earnings accruing to their importer. Costs associated with recruitment were deducted from wages. According to the 1838 Return, W. O. Donoghoe was responsible for 29 domestics—27 from St. Eustatius and 2 from St. Thomas—contracted to him variously for three, five, or seven years. R. Semple and Company contracted 38 Kittitians—field-hands, coopers, carpenters, porters, domestics, a mason and a sailor—for two, four, five and seven year stints. Semple’s unattached apprentices resided “in Town”, likely New Amsterdam, the urban hub of Berbice.

Contracts of Indenture

According to the 1838 Return, indentured Caribbean immigrants were bonded for periods lasting between three months and seven years. A Royal Order in Council of July 30, 1836 voided all contracts exceeding one year entered into outside the colony ostensibly ending lengthy, oppressive service.⁴⁴ A subsequent Order in Council of March 1, 1837 reduced the maximum length of future contracts from seven to three years for emancipated tradespeople considered not in need of lengthy apprenticeships, and set three years as the maximum term of service for all others, presumably manumitted slaves, runaways, and immigrants from non-British territories.⁴⁵ Several immigrants were employed apparently without written contracts. *Mt. Pleasant* (Demerara River) employed six Kittitian woodcutters and an Antiguan and a Montserratian were there, also without contracts.

Wage and non-wage compensation

Wage and non-wage compensation varied according to plantation, occupation, skill-level, and age and gender of each indentured apprentice. Payment relied on a variety

⁴⁴ Copies of all Orders, British Guiana and Mauritius in *Accounts and Papers, 1837-38*, pp. 21-22, and *passim*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, and p. 21.

of currencies and coinage for which relative value was determined only after complex calculations. Paper money was in limited circulation and issue varied in Demerara-Essequibo and Berbice.⁴⁶ Immigrant Apprentices receiving the lowest emoluments—manumitted field hands from the Dutch colonies—were purportedly offsetting the “heavy expenses” of their purchase and transportation to Guyana which cost, reportedly, between \$150 and \$200 per person. Significantly, and despite an apparent lack of bargaining power, groups of indentured immigrants skillfully negotiated incentives, persuading employers to provide incremental wage increases if they remained in service and were willing to re-indenture.⁴⁷

Occupations

As clarified by Higman problems of job definition during enslavement exist even while acknowledging the capacity of masters to know the occupations of the enslaved.⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, employers were aware of the jobs for which immigrants were hired but it is unclear to what extent the definitions included in the 1838 Return were provided by employers, the apprentices themselves, or represent the assumptions of the Special Justices of the Peace. Notwithstanding the caveats, it is unlikely that workers deviated widely from their assigned tasks especially with compensation on an established though sliding scale. Problems of seasonality might have affected non-specific occupations such as “any/all but field labourer”, “jobber” or “general labourer”, more than carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, or coopers, for example. Further, holding two jobs may have been an indicator of seasonal employment: a “trencher-field labourer” might have dug canals during the planting season and executed other field-related work later. A ‘sailor-puntman’ may have worked on a large river or ocean-going vessel, such as a schooner, and also on a plantation’s canal punts (barges) bringing

⁴⁶ Innes, 108-09.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴⁸ Higman, *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean 1807-1834*, p. 24.

loads of cane from the fields to the crushing mill. 'Employed about the buildings' and 'doing light work' described the duties of young children and adolescent apprentices employed in the factory buildings. Domestics, male or female, were a smaller majority.

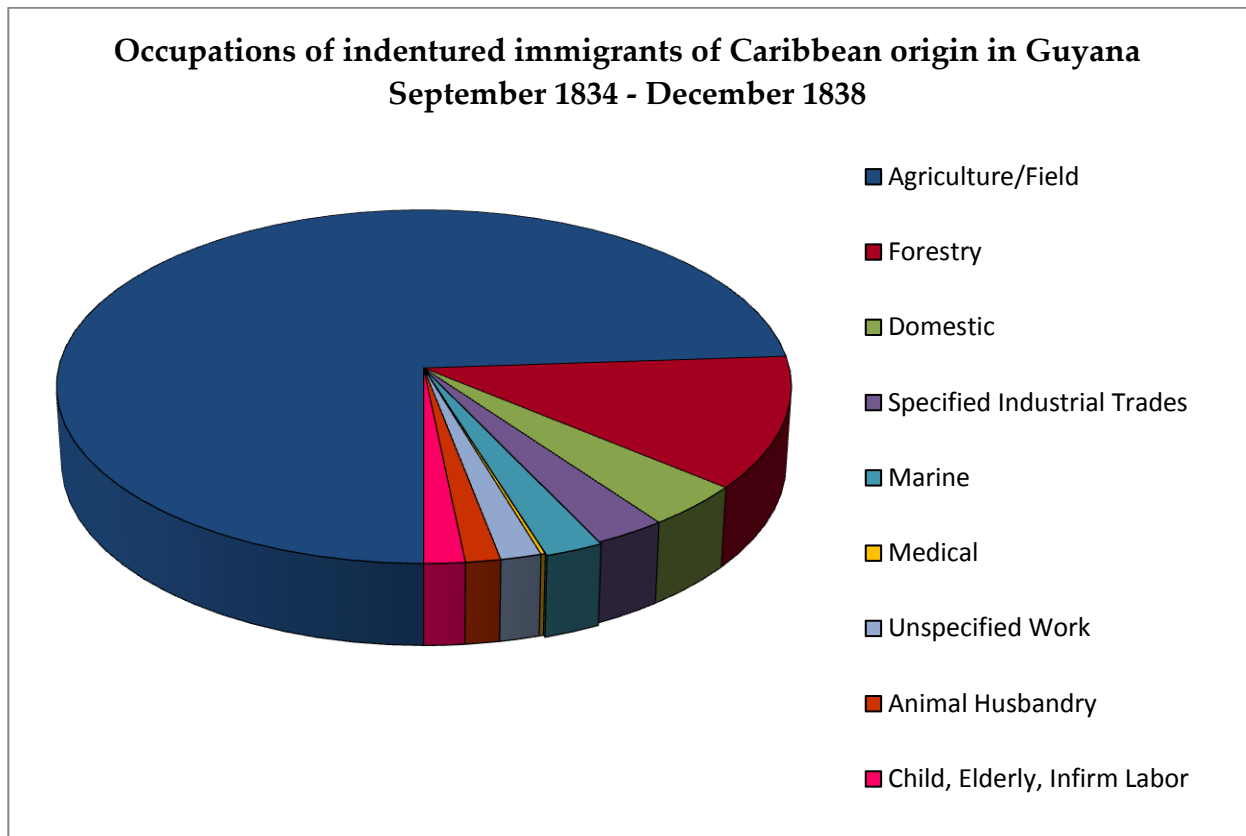


Figure 3: Occupations of indentured immigrants of Caribbean origin in Guyana, 1834-1838

Women's work and wages

Indentured women's work mirrored occupations established during enslavement and they earned a fraction of the wages paid to men. Two female workers at *Leonora* estate earned \$3.00 each, a dollar less than their male counterparts. Four of *Zeelandia's* five females earned \$3.00 (9 Guilders) per month but a fifth, Catherine Whitcomb, received only \$1.00 (3 Guilders). Mary Lake at *Henrietta* was "idle" but in good health and receiving \$2.88 (12 shillings) in wages, a possible indicator that she had been pregnant. While the majority were field- hands, many Caribbean women were domestics, washerwomen, and nurses and a few fulfilled two positions. Sophy, a 40-year old

Montserratian was both domestic and hospital nurse at *Spring Garden* as was Caroline, 45, from Anguilla. Significantly, two women worked as wood-cutters on T.M. Pollard's woodcutting establishment. Kittitian Felicia Fyfer earned \$7.26 (22 guilders) per month and Juba Philla from Montserrat earned \$4.95(15 guilders). Juba was serving a two-year contract that began in December 1837 but Felicia was unindentured.

Children, elderly and infirm immigrants

The term 'elderly' usually applied to immigrants older than 45 years though many listed as being younger were, in fact, older than the ages stated on the 1838 Return. Age or infirmity may have forced a 50-year old male Nevisian to remain on *Vigilance* after the departure of many indentured islanders from the estate in 1838. The 1838 Return records several very young indentured immigrant children on Guyana estates. A two-year-old Anguillan child began a 19-year contract on November 1836 and was already employed "about the Buildings" on *William (De Willem)*, two years later. Six Anguillan children worked unpaid on *William*: Peggy Proctor, 14, and Elizabeth Proctor, aged 10, were employed "in the buildings" with William Proctor, eight, Esther, five, and Christopher, a two-year old, all of whom held similar posts but received no wages. Nancy Christmas, a 14-year old from Montserrat, also worked unpaid about the buildings. Plantation *Schoonord* had four 12-year old Anguillans, similarly employed. Jenny, an "Invalid Girl" at *Orangefield* received the same food and clothing compensation as other apprentices but no wages. Noteworthy exceptions were Cecilia Farquharson, a 12-year old Watling's islander receiving \$1.50 monthly as a domestic on *Waller's Delight* and Webster Lake, another 12 year-old, apprenticed at *Henrietta* (Essequibo Coast) was bonded for three years from September 19, 1837 as a field-hand. While Webster earned but a third of the wages paid to the adult men, his food and clothing compensation was the same as given to adults on the estate. Apparently in lieu of money wages, 11 year-old Kittitian boat-building apprentice, Peter Benders,

boarded with his employer James Gordon at *Gordon's Retreat*. Six young immigrants below the age of 15 were at *Skeldon* as field-hands. Five were Statians between the ages of 11 and 14 contracted to "to learn a Trade" in lieu of wages while receiving equivalent clothing and rations as their adult counterparts.

Health and conduct

The reported behavior of the immigrants was a line item on the Return and so was their health although the method of assessment is unclear and might have been based on mere observation during the brief, occasional visits of the special justices. Generally, however, medical attention on the plantations was negligible and sporadic though legally guaranteed to each apprentice under the Abolition Act. Assessments range from "very healthy" to "very sickly" and included imprecise terms such as "Delicate", "Middling", "Debilitated" and "Indifferent". Entire immigrant groups on several estates was classed broadly as "Very good" and "Good" (*Friendship*, *Orangefield*, *Mon Bijou*, *Vrede en Vriendschap*) and "In General not good" (*New Forrest* and *Greenfield*, for example). Occasionally, specific causes of ill-health are noted such as "Bad in consequence of Miscarriage", "Sores", and dysentery. "Intermittent fever" (probably malaria), dropsy (edema), chigoes (skin parasites), sores and yaws (a contagious tropical bacterial skin infection producing painful abscesses that destroyed tissue, bone and joints), dysentery, and hepatic ailments resulting from alcoholism are all recorded, the latter likely related to the daily rum allowance given as "an indulgence" on Guyana plantations up to 1844. Despite being in "good" health, four of the estate's 14 indentured Antiguans had also died. Anguillans at *Greenfield*, who had been apprentices at home, were declared "industrious and well-behaved, cheerful and contented" despite the fact that their wages were lower than those paid to other field workers there and no clothing was provided. In contrast, the behavior of their fellow islanders on *Friendship* was "very bad" and 31 Bahamians at *Maria's Lodge* also showed

“unsatisfactory” behaviour. “Good Behaviour” by nine Antiguan at *Sand Hill* was exemplary enough to earn each a raise in wages averaging \$2.00 per month. Despite higher wages Martiniquans at Jackson and Company’s Saw Mill, with few exceptions, were “lazy, idle Characters”. Their compatriots at *Lafraternity* received pork and mackerel rations each week, in addition to their regular food allowances, and all were “Healthy” with “good” conduct. Martiniquans at *Browshurt* [sic] got unspecified amounts of “Plantains, Fish and Rice” and showed “Very bad” behavior. Apprentices from Curacao at *Met-en-Meerzorg* also received unfavorable reviews.

Post-1838 developments

The termination of Apprenticeship of August 1, 1838 marked the end of Caribbean indentured immigration to Guyana. Thereafter, even though islanders continued to migrate to the colony for work, they set their own rules and conditions. Potential workers came only if their travel expenses (“passage”) were covered, if they were able to work without contracts (un-indentured), and only when permitted to choose their employers.⁴⁹ Migration from the Caribbean atrophied also as sugar prices fell and employers lowered daily wages while demanding more of their workers. Employers also discontinued medical care and free housing, and restricted provision-grounds allotment on their estates thus lessening the attractiveness of working in Guyana.⁵⁰

Discussion and further research

From our own small Islands the People have been so promiscuously collected, that an Opinion formed upon their Conduct would be no Criterion of the Adaptation of the Island’s Labourers generally to the Climate and Kind of Work in [Guyana].⁵¹

⁴⁹ Copy of a Despatch from Governor Light to the Marquis of Normanby, 2 August 1839.

⁵⁰ Rodney, *Barbadian Immigration into British Guiana 1863-1924*, p. 1, and Levy, pp. 81-83.

⁵¹ *Correspondence relative to the Condition of the Hill Coolies and of other Labourers*, p. 11.

Despite Assistant Government Secretary Wolseley's disparaging remarks, the 1838 Immigration Return offers instructive insight into the circumstances of Caribbean indentureship in Guyana during the inaugural four-year period. From the Bahamas in the far north to the islands at the southern end of the archipelago, thousands of free, ex-slaves, newly-manumitted men, women and children, and runaways from colonies where slavery persisted, were on the move between 1834 and 1838. With promises of freedom before them and environmental and socio-economic pressures at their backs, many islanders departed their homelands for Guyana, the vast mainland colony where labor scarcity marked it as an emerging frontier of guaranteed work, notionally higher wages and presumed greater personal liberty. Migration must have seemed a boon, especially for ex-slaves and the enslaved whose existence at home had been tenuous and fraught with hardship.

Launching themselves into uncertain climate of the immediate post-Abolition period, Caribbean people ventured boldly into the unknown with the first arrivals landing on Guyana's shores by June 1835. Arrivals preceding the Order in Council of March 1, 1837 that regulated indentured immigration were stifled by longer contracts with lower wage and non-wage compensation than those who came later. Generally, workers coming from colonies where slavery persisted—the Dutch territories, and the Danish and Sweden-ruled islands—were purchased and manumitted solely for the purposes of apprenticeship in Guyana. These immigrants received the lowest compensation —money wages as low as \$1.00 monthly and little or no clothing, and the minimum of food as wages-in-kind. This demographic was assigned the longest bonds of seven years. At least 84 children - 15 years and younger - are accounted for in the flow of Caribbean indentured immigrants to Guyana between 1834 and 1838. When clothing or food was supplied to children, they were already child-laborers, a few as young as two years old. As with the elderly and infirm, children received very low wages and the youngest were unpaid.

Generally, low wages and minimal non-wage compensation conditioned the reported conduct and health status of the immigrants and, invariably, ill-health and indiscipline accompanied reports of low remuneration. Health care provision, supposedly a guarantee of Apprenticeship in the Caribbean, was undeniably sporadic with only a few plantation owners ensuring medicine or medical assistance for their indentured employees. "Medical attendance" received scant attention on the 1838 Return but, clearly, disease was widespread on plantations between 1834 and 1838. *Malgre Tout* was a particularly unhealthy location with 54 indentured immigrant deaths within a two-year span. Generally, an 'ample food' supply and 'good health' appear to correlate.

Information on housing provisions for remains a conspicuous omission. Further, details on food and clothing compensation are insufficient for assessing quality of rations or frequency of issue. Indentured immigrants reported as receiving legally mandated quantities of good quality food were judged as healthier than counterparts receiving less food. Employees at timber grants, for example, among the highest paid and usually receiving extra fish or meat rations, were "well behaved" and usually "healthy". Generally, where food was scarce, reported conduct was correspondingly and overwhelmingly unsatisfactory. The exception concerns African-Bahamians (Liberated Africans) at *Greenfield* estate who were singled out for praiseworthy conduct *en masse*. Despite receiving low wages and in-kind compensation, the health status of the group was uniformly "[g]ood" and their conduct "happy, cheerful, and contented". Moreover, they were "well-behaved, civil, and industrious".

Race emerges as a surreptitious undercurrent of the 1838 Return. While a majority of the indentured Caribbean arrivals between 1834 and 1838 are assumed to be black, or bi-racial (black/white), 69 "white workers" brought from St. Barts to cultivate coffee and plantains on *Malgre Tout* comprise the largest contingent so identified on the Return.

Generally, whether they came as climate refugees or chattel slaves, or both, or whether they were free people coerced with promises of economic improvement and unfettered liberty, indentured immigrant arrivals from the Caribbean substantially enlarged the worker pool in Guyana between 1834 and 1838. Evidently, the immigrants faced almost overwhelming hardships—near-starvation, chronic illnesses and harsh punishments—in a colony whose geographical vastness and labor scarcity had seemed tempting as an opportunity for greater liberty than the small islands they left behind. Whether they transplanted as groups or as individuals, the hardy immigrants dared to cast themselves abroad on their inland sea arriving at a new yet familiar setting—the plantation—where they confronted old challenges, negotiated new lives and found new freedoms for themselves and their families in an emergent industrial frontier.

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